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# Sexual Healing: Gender and Sexuality in the Healing Cult of Asklepios

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# **Sexual Healing**

## **Gender and Sexuality in the Healing Cult of Asklepios**

A senior Honors Thesis submitted to the

Greek and Roman Studies Program  
Illinois Wesleyan University

By

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“Hail to thee, Lord Paieon [Asklepios], ruler of Tricca, who hat got as thine sweet habitation sweet Cos and Epidauros...hail to her whom thou touchest with thy right hand, Hygieia, and those to whom belong these honored altars” (Herondas, *Mimiambi*, IV, 1-5, Ed: 275).

“...he who pursues the peak of health pursues a fleeting phantom which cannot be overtaken in the running even by Asklepios or Chiron” (Maximus Tyrius, *Philosophumena*, XL, 3 d-e, Ed: 270).

### **Abstract:**

This study analyzes gender roles and sexuality within the cult of Asklepios through the analysis of inscriptions, medical texts, poetry, and art. I argue that the ancient Greek understanding of gender identity and sexuality is so omnipresent that it permeates everything from the concepts of illness and health themselves, to the appearance of the deities, and even the way healing was received within the sacred precinct. Also, I contend that Hygeia and Asklepios, representing health through harmony with nature and medical intervention respectively, were created and function in healing cults as an interdependent, inextricably linked sexual binary: health is equated with femininity and nature while medicine is culturally constructed and masculine. I conclude that the balance and adequate influence of both the masculine and the feminine creative principles, embodied by the divinities of healing and represented by all actors and objects associated with them, must be present for healing to occur.

# Introduction

## Historical Framework

“Thus in Asklepieion illnesses are healed by divine dreams. Through the ordinances of visions that occur at night the medical art was composed from divinely inspired dreams” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, 3, 3, Ed: 209).<sup>1</sup>

In the fourth century BCE, the healing sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros was teeming with suppliants; men and women who sought divine healing in the form of *enkoimesis*, dream healing.<sup>2</sup> They entered the sacred precinct to spend a reverent night sleeping in the *abaton*<sup>3</sup> hoping to receive healing from the god via a dream. Epidauros became the most popular site of pilgrimage because of its reputation for the miraculous healings achieved by the god in dreams. These miracle cures were lauded in hundreds of inscriptions which adorned the temple complex. Asklepios was accompanied in worship and cult activity by the goddess Hygeia, the personification of health through harmony with nature. The healing cult of health and medicine, Hygeia and Asklepios, became so popular in this tumultuous time that similar centers of worship began appearing all across the Greek landscape.

In this paper I argue that the ancient Greeks perceived women as being connected to nature and men to culture; this perception was applied to Hygeia and Asklepios, who represent health through harmony with nature and medical intervention respectively. The divinities of healing embody and are imbued with the creative energies possessed by the male and female sex and function in healing cults as an interdependent, inextricably linked sexual binary. It is through the balanced action of these energies that these two divinities are capable of healing their

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<sup>1</sup> Whenever I cite a primary source from the compendium by Edelstein, I abbreviate Edelstein “Ed”, and cite the page number after a colon. Ex: “Ed: 209.”

<sup>2</sup> “Ritual act of “enkoimesis,” a dream-like state of sleep induction practiced in these shrines. While in this state, the patients waited to receive a dream vision of the god” (Askitopoulou, 11).

<sup>3</sup> *Abaton* means: untrodden, inaccessible; of holy places: not to be trodden; pure, chaste (Liddell and Scott, 2).

mortal suppliants. Through an analysis of cosmological myths, literature, and physical evidence, I demonstrate how the ancient Greek concepts of health, illness, medicine, and healing were, from their origins, also gendered ideological entities who maintained their gendered function and influence through the fourth century BCE in the healing cults of Asklepios. I conclude that the balance of both the masculine and the feminine creative principles, embodied by the divinities of healing and represented by all agents associated with them, is necessary for healing and restoration to health.

## **History of Scholarship**

The history of scholarship concerning Asklepios himself and the healing cults during the classical period exists in roughly three categories: studies of ancient medicine, analysis of concrete archaeological finds, and psychoanalysis of the healing cult. Ancient medicine is typically a comprehensive study of ancient philosophical texts and the technical works, like those attributed to the Hippocratic corpus, which recount the medical practices from the earliest, most basic salves and dietary prescriptions recommended at the healing sanctuaries to the far more advanced surgical procedures undergone at Cos. Vivian Nutton (2004) and especially Helen King (2005) have done many such studies in the last decade; while they focus on the body of evidence dedicated to ancient medicine as a whole, their work does not investigate miracle cures of Asklepios specifically.

The analysis of concrete archaeological finds, architecture, and the study of small finds such as dedicatory votive offerings within the sacred precinct itself provide the oldest body of scholarship related to Asklepios and his healing sanctuaries. Ludwig and Emma Edelstein's (1945) immense collection of every reference, from literature to medicine to testimony of the

suppliant, to Asklepios and his cult really set the foundation for subsequent studies. Their project is similar to mine, in that they group together the ancient material in order to create a picture of who Asklepios was and why the healing cult was important. However, their work is limited to the collection and rudimentary analysis of these finds and does not take into account the implications of gender within the Asklepieion.

The final field is that of psychoanalysis. In the cult of Asklepios the patient was healed through a dream. This appealed strongly to Jungian scholars such as C.A. Meier (1967) and C. Kerényi (1959), who believed that the healing sanctuary and the dream healing that occurred there was the first ancestor of modern psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Meier, a Jungian theorist and contemporary of Jung, believed that the dream healing that occurred within the temples to Asklepios was the “ancient prototype of modern psychotherapy” (Meier, 3); his interest in the cult of Asklepios was connected to psychoanalysis. The Jungians believe that “Asklepios cares for *soma* and *psukhe*, both body and mind—‘body and soul’” (Meier, xv); the same care they claim psychoanalysis provides. Meier and Kerényi argue that within the analysis of ancient sources, “the psychological aspect has been neglected...[but] the psychological aspect is extremely fruitful when applied to Greek mythology and ritual” (Meier, xii). These studies are informative when studying the cultic activities of Asklepios; yet they limit themselves largely to the myth of Asklepios and the testimonies of the healed; they, too, ignore a large quantity of the evidence.

My study lies somewhere in between each of these categories. It is an analysis of medical texts, philosophy, and literature regarding Asklepios and Hygieia. It also combines the archaeological analysis of inscriptions, art, and architecture with the psychoanalytic study, and adds cultural anthropology and poetics to reveal the importance of gender roles within the cult of

Asklepios. A gendered study of the healing cult of Asklepios at Epidauros has not been done. It is here that I hope to contribute.

## **Methodology**

I use the theoretical framework proposed by cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner, who suggests that “women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture” (Ortner, 73).<sup>4</sup> Sherry Ortner argues that women are universally subjugated because they are perceived as being closer to nature, while men are understood as closer to culture, with culture holding a higher value (Ortner, 70). She shows how this operates within society in three main categories: physiological, psychological and social (Ortner, 73-4). I accept this premise and use the healing cult of Asklepios and Hygeia as a "test case" to illustrate that, at least in this cult, ancient Greek culture did, indeed, place women and men into these categories. However, I also agree with Ortner when she says that 'nature' and 'culture' are "conceptual categories" (Ortner, 72) and the boundaries and oppositions are not always so clearly evident. So, in my analysis, I argue that in the case of the healing cult of Asklepios, a wide variety of evidence suggests that, although Asklepios is clearly associated with 'culture' and Hygeia as 'nature,' it also appears that a kind of "gender balance" is needed for the ill to be healed in the cult of Asklepios. This balance is seen both in myth, iconographical representations of the two divinities, the hypnotherapy ritual of the cure in the cult of Asklepios, and even within the sanctuary where the ritual takes place.

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<sup>4</sup> Her analysis seeks to prove that women are not in fact closer to nature than men in body or psyche. However, various aspects of her existence, such as the creative power, social role as nurturer, connection to seasonality through menstruation and gestation, encourage this perception, which is then perpetuated by her gendered social expectations imposed by the society (Ortner, 87).

For Ortner's physiological category I rely on written sources from philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and the Hippocratic corpus. Ortner's study suggests that most cultures, including, I argue, that of the ancient Greeks, views a woman's body and its functions, her physiology, to be more involved with "species life," which places her closer to nature; in contrast, man's physiology frees him more completely to take up the projects of culture (Ortner, 73). In other words, the elements of the female body, namely her creative energies which manifest themselves in menstruation and especially the ability to bear children, are perceived as having extremely strong connections to nature and encourage the perception of women as close to nature. Men, on the other hand, cannot express their creative energies within themselves and therefore must exert them outside, creating culture by manipulating nature, such as Asklepios' medicine. I argue that, the ancient Greeks confirm Ortner's observations; they created and enforced these nature/culture gender roles through the foundational myths of Hesiod and subsequently applied them to Asklepios, Hygeia and the concept of healing itself.

By examining artifacts such as inscriptions of the cure and the architecture of the sanctuary through the lens of cultural poetics, I show how Ortner's premise and 'social' category of the nature/culture gender binary can be seen in ancient Greek culture. The theory of "cultural poetics" is defined as the "process whereby a society and its subgroups construct widely shared meanings...[which] are jointly produced, distributed, enforced, and subverted by human communities" (Halperin, 4). This concept is useful in gendered studies of ancient Greece<sup>5</sup> as it explains how the gendered identities of women to nature and men to culture were formed and enforced by the Greeks themselves. Thus, I apply the Greek preconceptions of gender roles and

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<sup>5</sup> Sherry Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* (1974), Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (2005).



identity to the primary texts, inscriptions, and works of art that are relevant to Asklepios and Hygeia.

Using a Jungian approach to the dream healing in the sanctuary, I illustrate one way that gender balance seems to be achieved psychologically. To interpret the gendered imagery and implications involved in my study of the testimonies of the cure, art, and myth, I use the theories set down by the founders of psychoanalysis, Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. First, I conduct this analysis under Freud's assertion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that dreams condense cultural attitudes, like those of gender roles, personal desires, and latent sexuality, and transform them into one or more symbolically powerful experiences or images (Freud, 202-5). Moreover, "the dream appears to be a reaction to everything which is simultaneously present as the actual in the sleeping mind" (Freud, 128); therefore, all experiences within the healing cult and the desperate desire of the suppliant to receive healing could be expressed within the dream context.<sup>6</sup> Also I employ Jung and Freud's identification of specific entities as phallic and ithyphallic, that which evokes male potency, as well as the concept of the archetypal mother's womb to the analysis of dreams and art.

I primarily use Jung to analyze the gendered imagery within dreams. Jung's psychoanalysis and the discussion of the archetype is founded upon the understanding that "certain dream expressions and figures [are] in a general way considered to be rather definite symbols of these repressed ideas and feelings found in the unconscious..." (Jung, xix). These repressed understandings include wishes and desires of the individual, which, in the case of healing, would have been colored by the perceived gender roles and the belief in the necessity of

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<sup>6</sup> This expectation for the cure could lead to the placebo effect. The extreme desire of the patient to receive a dream from Asklepios and Hygeia and the expectation that this would lead to a cure could, in fact, bring about the cure, even if no real healing through surgery, treatment, or drugs is administered (King 2002: 52). However, the origin of the healing and the truth of the ailment are not essential to this study.

balance in gendered creative force for healing to occur. I use Jung's ideas of archetypes, mother symbolism, and male phallic symbolism, established in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, to interpret images and text (Jung, 248). I also employ Jung's concept of the maternal archetype as mother nature and the experience of rebirth and regeneration within the womb in my analysis.

As for Ortner's statement that women are considered second-class citizens in most societies because of these perceptions of women/nature and men/culture: what seems to be the case within the cult of Asklepios and Hygeia is that the ultimate goal, health (female/nature), seems impossible without the skills (*techne*) that Asklepios possesses, coupled with the validity and authority that his male being represents. However, this does not mean that Hygeia is a second-class citizen in this scenario. If she were a second-class citizen, why feature her so prominently? My reading of the evidence leads me to conclude that the state of health is indeed equated with nature and the feminine, but it is the ultimate goal of humans—certainly not a secondary or lesser desire. A male actor in the figure of Asklepios, and therefore a balance of masculine and feminine creative principles, is essential to achieve this state, but doesn't appear to "trump" nature.

I admit that it's difficult to come to any concrete conclusions about the role of gender in the cult of Asklepios because of the nature of the evidence. For instance, we have philosophical musings instead of scientific documents, artifacts without provenance, no knowledge of exactly who is creating the testimonies of the cure, or their motives. Nevertheless, this kind of study has great potential to shed light on how gender affected the religious culture of antiquity and, more specifically, the healing cult itself.

## **Outline of Study**

In the first section, I use Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* to demonstrate the ancient Greeks' perception of women as connected to nature and men to culture. I also recount the myths of Asklepios and Hygeia in order to reveal how Asklepios is inextricably connected to and dependent upon the feminine; I argue that his cultural art of medicine must be balanced by Hygeia's feminine natural health in order to truly heal suppliants. In the section two, I analyze the architecture and planning of the sacred precinct of Epidauros itself. I show that Epidauros is a femininely gendered space where connection to Asklepios as his birthplace increases its feminine power. Within the sacred precinct itself, the architecture and placement of the temple and *abaton* are similar to masculine and feminine space within the Greek *oikos*, household. The *abaton*, the center of the sacred activity, directly relates to the womb, the center of feminine creative energy itself. This femininely gendered space immediately provides a balance of creative energy for Asklepios' medical cures and the healing cult itself; it creates the perfect male-female creative duality necessary for healing.

In section three, I analyze the testimonies of specific instances of dream-healing received by the suppliants through incubation within the *abaton* at Epidauros. I show how sex and gender combine within the dream setting to cure the sick. The suppliant may be healed through the stimulation of their own sexual creative powers or by the balance of masculine and feminine interlocutors within the dream. Finally, section four focuses on the balance of masculine and feminine creative principles through the serpent, the animal intimately connected with the cult of Asklepios. The content and context of the images of Hygeia, Asklepios and the sacred serpent carefully communicate sexual and gender balance in the context of healing.

## Section 1:

### Asklepios, Hygeia, and the Literary Tradition

“Hail to thee, Lord Paieon [Asklepios], ruler of Tricca, who has got as thine sweet habitation sweet Cos and Epidauros...hail to her whom thou touchest with thy right hand, Hygieia, and those to whom belong these honored altars” (Herondas, *Mimiambi*, IV, Ed: 275).

The ancient Greeks of the fourth century BCE lived in a world where myth and history were intertwined. The myths of Hesiod in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* explained to the Greek audience how the cosmos, physical landscape, and the deities who make up and govern the known world were created. It was in these foundational myths that the ancient Greek perceptions of gender roles were formed and encouraged. For the Greeks, the myths reinforced a perception that women are connected to nature and men to culture; which was later projected upon Hygeia and Asklepios.

In the *Theogony*, Hesiod says that “in the beginning...Gaia, the Earth, came into being, her broad bosom the ever-firm foundation of all” (Hesiod, 117). The ancient Greek cosmos was created by Earth, mother nature; Gaia then gives birth to her first child, male Ouranos, “starry Heaven, just her size, a perfect fit on all sides. And a firm foundation for the blessed gods” (Hesiod, 126-8), with whom she engages sexually. From the very moment of creation, therefore, Gaia is presented as the ultimate archetype of mother nature who carries and gives birth to all the primordial gods. Ouranos, on the other hand, at first a “perfect fit,” is driven by his desire to create for himself, to manipulate nature by taking sexual advantage of Gaia’s creative force, causing her to “groan under the pressure inside” (Hesiod, 160). Thus the divine antecedent to the male race, Ouranos, manipulates nature through his sexual role as penetrator. The creation story in *Theogony*, then, connects men to culture through Ouranos and women to nature through Gaia.

The mother earth archetype and connection to nature established by Gaia is transferred to Hygeia, Health, who embodies health through harmony with nature. Hygeia's identity as "good health" models a proper balance of the body's elements, as opposed to the unnatural state of disease. Referenced in many laudatory hymns and dedications,<sup>7</sup> she is the prime good, without which none of life's other advantages can be enjoyed (Stafford, 122). Athenaeus calls her "Hygeia (Health), most revered of the blessed ones among mortals" (*Deipnosophistae*, Ariphron, Fragment 813). The Orphic Hymn 68 to *Hygeia* praises her as the "life-bearing...fertile queen...mother of all" who makes "disease dire, of bliss destructive, from our life retire."

Hygeia, then, is perceived as being connected to nature; like Gaia, she embodies the feminine creative principles of fertility. Like Gaia, she is lauded as the mother of all. Her domain within the healing cult of Asklepios represents "the other kind of health they [sc., the theologians] assume to have been created before Asklepios and to be coexistent with the creation of things" (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum*, III, 158 E, Ed: 155); the state of harmony with nature, health, that was established with Gaia and remained until the introduction of disease in Hesiod with Pandora (*Works and Days*, 123).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Hygeia heals through returning one to his or her natural state of health.

As a complement to Hygeia's natural health and healing, Asklepios acts as the god of medicine, a cultural *techne*, or skill, whose connection to culture as a male deity was established by Prometheus. Men are connected to culture through the trickery of Prometheus in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Zeus had kept fire from the race of men, but Prometheus "stole it right back

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<sup>7</sup> Euenus, *Fragment 6*; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1001; Licymnius, Fragment 769, from *Sextus Empiricus, Against the Ethicists*.

<sup>8</sup> The testimonies of "the Epidaurian collection, on the contrary, clearly reflects the Classical, Hippocratic idea that the body itself, if left to its own devices, would naturally tend to a balanced condition of health, providing no environmental (external, i.e. "foreign") factors interfered" (LiDonnici, 3).

out from under Zeus' nose, hiding the flame in a fennel stalk" (Hesiod, 68-70) and delivering it to men. Through this trickery, Prometheus achieves the ultimate manipulation of natural elements, stealing fire, and thus represents the second example of the cultural creative energies of men in the works of Hesiod. This act delivers a skill (the ability to create fire) to mankind; thus man is capable of organizing into communities around to establish complex cultures.

"Prometheus was thought to have brought the *technai* from the divine to the mortal world" (King 2002: 8). In ancient Greek, *techne* means art, skill, craft, to learn a thing professionally (Liddell, 1785); the ability to make fire was understood as the first *techne*. In the gendered context, *techne* is analogous to male cultural skills and creations; therefore the myth of Prometheus reinforces the perception that crafts and skills are male. Asklepios, therefore, contributes the *techne* of medicine as a cultural construct in the ritual of healing.

In both the Prometheus and Ouranos myths, we see that the ability to manipulate natural elements and create culture makes up the masculine creative principle and this is where medicine, the skill of Asklepios, lies. The author of *Regimin 1*, a work attributed to the Hippocratic school of medicine, compares Asklepios' medicine with a range of other *technai*: for example, it is like the *techne* of the shoe-maker, because it cuts and sews to make something sound, and like that of builders, because it makes moist what is dry and dries what is moist, to create a harmonious whole (King 2002: 8). As a *techne*, then, Asklepios' art of healing is a cultural and therefore male skill. Asklepios is in fact compared to Prometheus by Aristedes, who says "Now for us, he [Asklepios] has put together and fastened not part of the body, but the whole frame, and has given it to us as a present, just as of old Prometheus is said to have fashioned man" (*Oratio* XLII, 1-15, Ed: 160).

Asklepios' connection to culture is further emphasized by ancient writers such as Proclus, who attributes to Asklepios "the one kind of health, namely that which results from the whole process of healing whatever is contrary to nature" (*In Platonis Timaeum*, III, 158 E, Ed: 155). This healing that is contrary to nature is the *techne* of medicine, the cultural element embodied by Asklepios. Asklepios' masculine, cultural identity is further supported by Arnobius, who calls him "the discoverer of medicines, as the guardian and protector of Health, of strength, and of well-being" (*Adversus Nationes*, I, 41, Ed:189). Here, Asklepios takes on the role of protector and provider which, in the ancient Greek understanding, was reserved for the male. Hygeia represents health, nature, and the female creative powers which are rooted in the woman's natural power to create life within herself: to bear children. Both of these gendered creative principles, embodied by the deities, must be present and active for healing of the suppliant, an individual whose body has become ill, and thus has fallen out of sync with its natural, healthy state. Here, the male Asklepios is understood as protector, provider, and penetrator (Winter, 22).<sup>9</sup> Hygeia, as female health, needs his protection. Thus, both of these gendered creative principles, embodied by these deities, must be present to heal the ill who have fallen out of balance.

According to his myth, Asklepios is taught the *techne* of medicine by Chiron the centaur (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III, Ed: 8-9). Chiron is part human, part horse, and therefore represents the theoretical fusing of the natural world, equated with femininity, and the cultural world of men. Horses, I argue later, are also connected to sexuality, and therefore the centaur innately possesses the masculine and feminine creative elements and latent sexuality necessary for healing. Chiron is skilled in the *techne* of medicine, and because he is half-nature, half-

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<sup>9</sup> In her gendered study of the masculine physique in Near Eastern art, Irene Winter explains that masculinity hinges upon the three P's—protect, provide, and (im)pregnate. These central concerns of men are represented through the depiction of the male ruler's posture and body in art.

culture, Chiron may teach Asklepios the art of healing. Asklepios becomes an extremely skilled surgeon (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III, Ed: 8-9), and although he has mastered the medical *techne*, he must always be complemented by femininity in the form of nature. As exemplified by the sexual duality of Chiron who taught him the prerequisites for healing, Asklepios' male healing arts must be balanced by the feminine in order to cure his suppliants. Thus from the myth where Asklepios is first taught his *techne*, it is evident that medicine alone cannot restore one to one's natural state of health.

Asklepios is also shown to be dependent upon and inextricably connected to the feminine creative forces through the sheepdog, who raises him (Theodoretus, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio*, VIII, Ed: 11-12). Ovid tells us that the mortal infant Asklepios is wrenched from his mortal Mother's womb (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, Ed: 7), a violent perversion of natural birth. He is then exposed by his divine father, Apollo; leaving him in the physical care of Nature herself. In his case, Nature not only provides for him by sending a female sheepdog to feed and protect him, but it reverses the initial discontinuity caused by his violent, unnatural birth by nourishing and nurturing Asklepios from infancy, at his most vulnerable moment. In sum, the female representative of nature, the sheepdog, is Asklepios' first caretaker, his first healer, that establishes ontological connection to and dependence upon the feminine creative principles. As I will show later, this myth is reinforced in the ritual of healing through the powers of the dog.

Etymologically, Asklepios' name reveals his gendered duality. In Greek, it combines Ask+epios, which, according to C.A. Meier, reveals "his most conspicuous quality," *epiotes*, gentleness (Meier, 23). The meaning of the final syllable -epios, "gentle, kind, mild, soothing" (Liddell, 776), is confirmed by Pindar, who called him "the most gentle bestower of painlessness and health" (Scholia in Pindarum, *Ad Pythias*, III, 9, Ed: 33). The first syllable Ask- is derived



from the Greek *askeo*, which means both “I work raw materials, work curiously, form by art,” or “I practice, I [develop] a skill” (Liddell, 257). So, Asklepios embodies the dual qualities of gentleness and *techne*. He is a deity who uses masculine skill, *techne*, to manipulate nature’s raw materials, and also possesses and employs unceasing gentleness, *epiotes*, an undeniably feminine characteristic, in order to heal his patients. In short, Asklepios’ name itself represents the balance of male and female creative principles that is necessary for healing.

Asklepios’ name also initiates a larger connection to what are typically viewed by ancient Greeks to be feminine qualities and female creative forces. Other ancient etymologies add that Asklepios’ name means “one who does not allow men to be...parched and dried up and mortified by diseases...or because he makes the harsh in illness mild” (Scholia in Lycophronem, *Ad Alexandram*, 1054:126, Ed: 126). Aristotle describes men as hard, hot, impenetrable, and aggressive (*On the Generation of Animals*, 765b8, Lf: 227),<sup>10</sup> yet Asklepios’ very name lauds his gentleness, his ability to restore moisture from those who have dried out and hardened. Aristotle contrasts men, as hot, with women, whom he describes as wet, cold, spongy and easily penetrated (Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 765b8, Lf: 227). Asklepios contradicts his innately dry masculine nature and heals the overly-dry (overly-masculine) patient with female creative force: wetness and moisture. Therefore Asklepios mediates the binary opposition of male (hard, hot) and female (cold, wet) with the *techne* of medicine and his gentle nature.

Just as Asklepios needs the feminine creative principles to survive and prosper in myth, so his medical arts must be balanced, complemented, and supplemented with the feminine in order for healing to take place. Asklepios cannot heal the sick without the adequate presence of the female creative principle, embodied by Hygeia; healing requires a return to one’s natural

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<sup>10</sup> Whenever I cite a primary source from the compendium by Lefkowitz, I abbreviate Lefkowitz “Lf”, and cite the page number after a colon. Ex: “Lf: 227.”

state, which is health. Maximus Tyrius says "...he who pursues the peak of health pursues a fleeting phantom which cannot be overtaken in the running even by Asklepios or Chiron" (Maximus Tyrius, *Philosophumena*, XL, 3 d-e, Ed: 270). This assertion indicates that the female Hygeia must balance the masculine *techne* of medicine for health and healing to occur.

The evidence of ancient philosophers and writers such as Aristotle, Aristides, Proclus, and the Hippocratic corpus, suggests that they believed the necessity for balance of female and male creative principles in order for healing to occur. Plato says of medical *techne* that "the physician's task is to effect a reconciliation and establish mutual love between the most basic bodily elements...They are, of course, those that are most opposed to one another, as hot is to cold...wet to dry...In fact, our ancestor Asklepios first established medicine as a profession when he learned how to produce concord and love between such opposites" (Plato, *Symposium*, 186D-E). Here, Plato directly addresses the need for balance between masculine and feminine creative principles in order for one to be healthy. The male/female binaries of heat/cold, dry/wet must be in balance in order for the individual to be healed; he attributes the ability to produce this healing balance directly to Asklepios who, as we have seen from his myth and his very name, fuses *techne* with nature, embodied by Hygeia, to heal.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly to Plato, Hippocrates, considered to be the founder of modern medicine, indicates that balance between male and female elements within the body is necessary for one to be healthy. Regarding the patient, Hippocrates says "he is particularly healthy when these constituents [hot/dry/male, cold/wet/female] are in due proportion to one another with regard to blending, power and quantity, and when they are perfectly mixed" (Hippocrates, *Nature of Man*

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<sup>11</sup> This indicates that perhaps "Asclepius priests practiced noology, a philosophy based on the belief that illness was due to imbalances in the body. When the mind (*noos* in Greek) becomes harmonious with nature, the imbalances are corrected and health is restored" (Hart, 79).

4 (VI.38, 19-40, 9L, Lg: 32).<sup>12</sup> Other philosophers echo the sentiments of Hippocrates and Plato that the conditions for health exist in the balance between masculine and feminine elements within the body.<sup>13</sup> This evidence suggests that the ancient philosophers understood that, just as in bodily health, the act of healing requires both male and female creative powers to be present and active. Therefore, the belief that sexual duality was necessary for healing to occur was projected upon the representatives of male and female creative principles within the healing cult: Asklepios and Hygeia.

Since it was understood that healing necessitated this gender balance, Asklepios and Hygeia were always worshipped together within the healing cults. The *Inscriptiones Graecae* state that "...it was decreed by the Demos...to sacrifice to Asklepios and to Hygeia twice each year on behalf of themselves and of the people whom they healed" (*IG*<sup>14</sup>, II2, no. 772, Edelstein 552, 309). This inscription indicates that Asklepios and Hygeia were believed to heal their suppliants together, and only together. It also suggests that their worship, which included sacrifice, was simultaneous and so important that it was mandated by the *demos*.

Even outside the sacred precinct and ritual, the two divinities are praised and supplicated in tandem. An orphic Hymn pleading for health and good fortune addresses Asklepios and Hygeia together:

Healer of all, Asklepios, Lord Paean, softening the painful sufferings of men's diseases,  
giver of gentle gifts, mighty one, may you come bringing health and checking illnesses

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<sup>12</sup> Whenever I cite a primary source from the compendium by Longrigg, I abbreviate Longrigg "Lg", and cite the page number after a colon. Ex: "Lg: 32."

<sup>13</sup> 1) "What preserves health is the equal distribution of its forces—moist, dry, cold, hot, bitter, sweet, etc., - and the domination of any one of them created disease: for the dominance of any is destructive....Health, by contrast, is a harmonious blending of the qualities" (Aetius, *On the Opinions of the Philosophers* 5, 30, 1 = Alcmaeon DK 24 B 4., Nutton, 47). 2) "There is in both the female and in the male both male-procreation and female-procreation" (Hippocrates, *On Generation* 8 (VII.480, 7-482, 2L), Lg: 57). 3) "He who is intending to write correctly about human regimen must first acquire knowledge and discernment of the nature of man as a whole" (Hippocrates, *Regimen I.2* (VI.486, 6-40, 13L, from Lg: 46).

<sup>14</sup> *IG* will be used as the abbreviation for *Inscriptiones Graecae*.

and the harsh fate of death...enemy of diseases, having as your wife faultless Hygieia, come blessed one, savior, granting a good end to life (Orphei, *Hymni*, LXVII, Ed:335).

Asklepios heals his suppliants through “softening” man’s illness and suffering, an action which refers back to his etymological connection to the feminine through his “gentleness.” Here, Asklepios is also able to be the masculine “enemy of disease” through his *techne*, and is thus a healer through his sexual duality. However, Hygieia is included in this plea for health and called “faultless,” indicating the state of harmony with nature she embodies. Because they are both praised and supplicated in this hymn, we see that the ancient Greeks understood healing to require the equal presence of masculine and feminine creative principles. Although health is represented by a god who possesses male and female attributes, it is clear that Asklepios’ *techne* alone is not sufficient for healing. Hygieia represents his other half, who as harmony with nature, is both the beginning and the end result of the *techne*,<sup>15</sup> who must be present in order for healing to be attained.

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<sup>15</sup> Health was believed to be the pure state in which one is born before disease can pollute the body; as well as the state one reaches after healing (LiDonnici, 3).

## Section 2:

### The Sacred Precinct

“The adornment of Epidauros is the precinct of Asklepios, where those who sleep in his temple get remedies for their diseases from the admonitions which they receive in their dreams” (Solinus, *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*, Cp. 7, 10, Ed: 381).

The sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros can also be analyzed from a gendered perspective. In a fragment of Aristoteles, he refers to Epidauros itself “in the feminine gender” (*Fragmenta*, 491, Ed: 277). From this we learn that the healing sanctuary itself is gendered feminine. Pausanias describes as the birthplace of Asklepios, recounting the myth that “In the country of the Epidaurians [his mother] bore a child [Asklepios] and exposed him on the mountain...As the child lay exposed one of the goats that pastured about the mountain gave him milk, and the watch-dog of the herd guarded him” (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, II, Ed: 14). Other inscriptions reinforce the idea that Epidauros itself is the maternal city of Asklepios (*IG*, IV2, 1, no. 128, iii, 32-iv, Ed: 331). The recognition of Epidauros as Asklepios’ birthplace indicates that it was here that he first experienced and was tied to the feminine creative forces. Here he was torn from his mortal mother’s womb, exposed to the elements, and, most importantly, it was here that nature, the land of Epidauros itself, first nurtured and provided for Asklepios.<sup>16</sup> The sacred precinct, from a Jungian perspective, therefore assumes identity and creative powers of the mother archetype and the womb.<sup>17</sup>

The design of the sacred precinct of Asklepios (see Figure 1, plan of Epidauros c. 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) can be interpreted through the lens of gender and sexuality. Its buildings and features, most important of which is the *abaton*, are physically demarcated into male/public and

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<sup>16</sup>Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, Ed: 7.

<sup>17</sup> Jung, 269

female/private spaces, similar to the gendered division of the ancient Greek household, *oikos*. According to Liddell and Scott, *oikos* is defined as home, a room, tomb, temple or sacred precinct (Liddell, 1204-5). In the home, the female space, *gunaikonitis* (Liddell, 363), is an interior space separated from the rest of the household; located on the second floor around the central courtyard, protected, and closed off (Nevett, 363). The male space, *andron* (Liddell, 129), is also enclosed within the walls of the house, yet open for public entrance for the purposes of entertainment, and is located on the outer limits of the home, often opening directly onto the street (Nevett, 369). Similarly, as we see in Figure 1, in Asklepios' sacred precinct, the outer courtyard, tholos, altars, and other associated public structures are easily accessible from the main entrance to the sacred precinct and are public spaces.

The *abaton* in the temple of Asklepios, like the *gunaikonitis*, is a private, closed off space,<sup>18</sup> most likely in the stoa on the top of Figure 1, situated north of the Tholos and directly across from the central temple to Asklepios (LiDonnici, 13). *Abaton* refers to holy places and literally means “not to be trodden, inaccessible, pure, chaste” (Liddell, 2). Suppliants “came to the *abaton* and slept there and saw a vision” (*IG*, IV2, 37, Ed: 236); thus, this was the sacred space where dream healing occurred. The *abaton*, therefore, was the center of worship and the liminal space where the divine could intervene in the mortal world. The Epidaurian inscriptions, in fact, use the terms *abaton* and “temple” interchangeably<sup>19</sup> when referring to the place the suppliants slept to receive the cure, indicating that the *abaton*, like the temple itself, would have been universally regarded as the most central, innately sacred space within the precinct.

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<sup>18</sup> There is scholarly debate as to the actual location of the *abaton/adyton* and its use (Hollinshead 1999: 189). Elderkin and Holwerda argue that the identification of the stoa as the *abaton* is likely false (161). Here, I chose to present the opinion of LiDonnici, 2003, who provides the most recent scholarship on this issue, that the stoa was the location of sleep incubation at Epidaurus.

<sup>19</sup> *IG*, IV, for “temple”: 8, 12, 15, 19, 21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 33, 34, 40; *Abaton*: 1, 7, 24, 29, 37.

Like the *gunaikonitis*, the *abaton* was sacred, closed off, and private. Moreover, Xenophon tells us that although the *gunaikonitis* was a private women's space, it was also "the space to be penetrated by lovers" (*Oeconomicus*, 7.20, 22, 30). Thus, this female gendered, private space was also the space wherein the creative energies of male and female were expected to comeingle, combining to form new life in children. This is precisely the role the *abaton* may play within the healing sanctuary: the symbolic womb, where male and female creative principles combine to rejuvenate and heal (Jung, 272). As Tick observes, the suppliant enters the *abaton*, "the great Mother Earth's womb, where through her incubation, nurturing, and touch, often by way of dreams and animal helpers, the suppliant can experience a return of the primal, life-giving energies" (Tick, 31). Here, the suppliant experiences a dream, often sexual, that rejuvenates through the balanced intervention of male and female sexual creative forces.

### Section 3:

## Sexuality in Ritual of the Cure

Asklepios' temple was always "full of the sick, and also of the votive tablets on which the treatments are recorded" (Strabo, *Geographica*, VIII, 6, 15, Ed: 380). These tablets combined praise and thanks in one (Versnel, 54); they recorded testimonies of dream healing experienced by the suppliant of Asklepios and Hygeia while sleeping within the *abaton*. "The god was believed to visit the suppliant through a dream, or in his theriomorphic (animal-shaped) form, as a snake or dog. Through the theophany itself (the apparition of the god) or through one of the first "prescriptions"...the healing would come" (Larsen, xiv).<sup>20</sup>

The healing dream appeared differently to every suppliant, but in general the testimonies suggest that one could achieve healing through the applied powers of the balanced creative forces of both genders in two ways: first, through the presence of both masculine and feminine creative forces applied to the patient by Asklepios himself, the serpent, or the dog within the dream. Second, healing can occur through the stimulation of the suppliant's own sexual creative powers by the god or one of his representatives in a dream. The serpent and the dog are entities that Festus indicates are associated with Asklepios and are always present within the sacred precinct.<sup>21</sup> Asklepios' animal consorts are usually connected with virility and masculinity. They are potent, dangerous, aggressive animals that embody masculine symbols, in the case of the

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<sup>20</sup> Asklepios' *techne* of medicine does not appear directly in the descriptions I study. There is no persuasive evidence to suggest that the priests of Asklepios at Epidaurus performed complex surgical procedures before those physicians educated at Cos under the Hippocratic corpus of medicine (Halliday, 18); no surgical instruments were discovered there as they were at the Asklepieion on the island of Cos (Askitopoulou, 16). However, there are many inscriptions which confirm that Asklepios' *techne* was employed through dietary prescriptions, topical remedies, and other small-scale surgical procedures (IG, IV2, 1, #6, 9, 12, 40, Ed: 231-237).

<sup>21</sup> "The serpent is the guard of this temple because it is a most vigilant beast and this faculty is especially appropriate in safeguarding the health of individuals. Dogs are also used in his temple because the god was nourished by the teats of a dog" (Festus, *De Verborum Significatu*, 110 M, Ed: 362).



ithyphallic serpent, and behavioral archetypes, as embodied by the aggressive protector, the dog. However, the dog and the serpent also embody feminine qualities and connections as a counterpart to Asklepios' masculine identity. The serpent and the dog are able to balance out the sexual scales, either in themselves independently or by assimilating with a particular gender, and provide the necessary codependent duality between the masculine and feminine creative principle necessary for restoration and healing. Therefore, they are liminal beings, chthonic representations of the healing cult and the supernatural forces of healing itself. Embodying the creative potential and characteristics of both genders allows the serpent and the dog to possess the power of healing completely and independently.

When observed from a Jungian perspective, the dog exhibits archetypal male behavior in daily life, in his role as protector of the sanctuary, and in sexuality through its aggression and violent tendencies, likened to the male role as penetrator (Meier, 26-7; Kerenyi, 29-30). However the dog also exhibits many female qualities, especially within the healing cult. In Asklepios' myth, his personal connection to the dog was with a mother-figure sheepdog; aspects of femininity, such as nurturing, childbearing, and provider of nourishment, are embodied by the female dog who nursed and cared for infant Asklepios. This is yet another example of Asklepios' ontological ties to the natural feminine creative principle. And, as we have discussed, true healing and restoration to one's original state of Health, a feminine entity, cannot be achieved through the machinations of the male creative principle alone. Therefore, the dog's dual gender allows it to bring about healing independently.

There are several cure testimonies from the *Inscriptiones Graecae* that feature the dually-gendered healing power of dogs. These dreams are unusual because, as Rousselle notes, “both cures happened while the boys were awake” (Rousselle: 1985, 374).<sup>22</sup> The cures are as follows:

A dog cured a boy from Aegina. He had a growth on the neck. When he had come to the god, one of the sacred dogs healed him—while he was awake—with its tongue and made him well.

Lyson of Hermione, a blind boy. While wide-awake he had his eyes cured by one of the dogs in the Temple and went away healed.

Here, the boys encounter one of Asklepios’ sacred canines. The dog undergoes a sexual encounter with the adolescents in order to heal them: the lick. In these cases the lick from the dog alludes to the powerful restorative and healing quality of canine saliva, but it can also refer to the powerful sexual subtext communicated by the exchange of saliva. As the dog licks the boy’s eyes, there is a transfer of sexually-charged fluid. The tongue of the dog is phallic; thus, in touching the part of the boys’ body which needs healing, applies sexually charged creative fluids.

The serpent inherently possesses the masculine and feminine balance of creative power that is necessary in order to heal; this gives the serpent its incredible import and power in the Pan-Hellenic cult of Asklepios. In order to establish a new sanctuary of Asklepios, “it seems that it was necessary to move a cult object from another sanctuary: in this case the famous snakes of Asklepios” (King: 2001, 4). To found the temple to Asklepios on the Acropolis in Athens in 420/419 (King: 2001, 4), a sacred serpent was taken from Epidauros and brought to the new site of the healing sanctuary (Lang, 6). This was not a practice unique to Athens; “there were in the whole of the ancient world about 410 Asclepian sanctuaries, almost all of which were linked with Epidauros” (Meier, 16), likely through the transference of one of Asklepios’ sacred serpents. Because the serpent represents rebirth and rejuvenation and contains the balanced and

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<sup>22</sup>IG, IV, I2, 122, 26=T, 26, Ed: 234, for the boy with the growth on his neck; 122, 22=T 423, 22, Ed: 233 for Lyson.

remarkable power to heal through both male and female creative forces, it has the power to transfer the dually-gendered art of healing within itself to a newly established Asklepieion. This transference of power through the serpent establishes the environment and prerequisites for healing.

In specific, within the context of the healing sanctuary at Epidauros, the serpent represents both male potency, in that it is an aggressive, phallic being, and female creative energy, because it has the ability to generate new life within itself by shedding its skin. The serpent is also linked to femininity through a lunar connection. Macrobius states that Health “is by nature a lunar influence”, and subsequently a female influence, as the moon is gendered female. He goes on to say that serpents are associated with Health and the moon because of their shared powers of rebirth and rejuvenation (Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I, 20, 1-4, Ed:149-150). The serpent is further connected to the lunar cycle and the moon through Pliny who remarks of Asklepios’ sacred serpents that “the snake is not venomous, except when according to (the time of) the month it is irritated by the moon” (*Naturalis Historia*, XXIX, 4 (22), 71-72, Ed: 365). The snake, poisonous and dangerous when the lunar cycle agitates it, directly relates to the ancient Greek perception of the dangers of the woman during the menstrual cycle<sup>23</sup> which “tends to take place when the moon is waning” (Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 766a17, Lf: 229). The serpent, therefore, is dually gendered and, like the dog, possesses the power of healing independently.

In ritual of healing, there are many instances of men and women being healed by the touch of the sacred serpent within the *abaton* of Epidauros. The serpent always touches the suppliant, and applies the balanced creative powers of both sexes to the suppliant in order to bring about the cure. Since the snake is an ithyphallic entity, this physical contact is inherently

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<sup>23</sup> See “Hysteria.” Ex: Hippocrates, *Diseases of Women* 2.126, 123 = VIII. Lf: 271-3.

sexual, and thus the dream becomes erotic, the product of which is the stimulation of the suppliant's own sexual creative energies. Like the dog, the snake often heals through the exchange of sexually-charged fluid in the form of saliva. This is the case in the first example:

A man had his toe healed by a serpent. He, suffering dreadfully from a malignant sore in his toe, during the daytime was taken outside by the servants of the Temple and set upon a seat. When sleep came upon him, then a snake issued from the Abaton and healed the toe with its tongue, and thereafter went back again to the abaton. When the patient woke up and was healed he said he had seen a vision; it seemed to him that a youth with a beautiful appearance had put a drug upon his toe (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 17, Ed: 233).

Here, Rousselle interprets the toe "to have phallic significance...meaning...strength and virility...We have no idea how the man injured his toe, but its unabated painful condition perhaps called into doubt his virility, since he was now weak. The homoerotic dream will have calmed his fears" (Rousselle: 1985, 347), awakened his sexuality and masculine creative principles through the encounter with the phallic serpent, and allowed him to be healed. The sacred serpent is phallic and evokes homoerotic sexuality in the suppliant, yet it is also feminine as, within the womb space of the *abaton*, it balances the male gender of the suppliant and rejuvenates him through its restorative touch, saliva.

Women's interactions with the serpent within the dream often occur when they are barren. These encounters with the phallic, male gendered serpent have the power to invigorate her sexual energies and restore her to health from her infertile state.

"Artemidorus reminds us that in a dream the snake refers to the god to whom it is sacred, in Epidauros, that would of course be Asklepios" (Rousselle: 1985, 342).<sup>24</sup>

Agameda of Ceos. She slept in the Temple for offspring and saw a dream. It seemed to her in her sleep that a serpent lay on her belly. And thereupon five children were born to her (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 39, Ed: 237).

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<sup>24</sup> Artemidorus, *Onerocritica* 1. 47.

The serpent represents Asklepios' masculine creative potential as his phallus and therefore, the act of the serpent touching her belly, where her creative energies lie, both balanced the creative principles necessary for healing and invigorated her sexuality. Because the encounter with the phallic serpent stimulates Agamedea's sexuality, the serpent/god is able to cure her infertility through the serpent-eroticism. In another dream interaction with Asklepios' phallic and potent serpent,

Nicasibula of Messene for offspring slept in the Temple and saw a dream. It seemed to her that the god approached her with a snake which was creeping behind him; and with that snake she had intercourse. Within a year she had two sons (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 42, Edelstein: 237).

We see here that "Nicasibula has intercourse with the snake, which is the god's disembodied phallus" (Rousselle: 1985, 342). Meier takes this interpretation a step further, arguing that "literally in the case of women who consult Asklepios because they are barren; the god comes to them in the form of a serpent and impregnates them" (Meier, 63). This dream is the most overtly erotic of the testimonies as Nicasibula actually dreams intercourse with the serpent. Here, the serpent is acting literally as Asklepios' phallus; it impregnates her with the cure to her impotence through the arousal of her own dormant sexuality. The serpent's male creative energies within the female gendered *abaton* are heightened through the experienced sex act; subsequently, Nicasibula is dramatically healed through intercourse with the god himself. Thus, sexuality and the balance of gendered creative principles bring about the cure to her sexual ailments.

The inscriptions suggest that one way suppliants can experience healing within the *abaton* is to experience a rejuvenation, or arousal, of their individual and most basic creative powers through sexuality. In other words, one way to be healed in a dream is for the male

suppliant's creative energy as penetrator, provider, and protector to be invigorated either through sexual arousal, a profoundly sexually-charged experience, or the emission of semen.

A man with a stone in his membrum. He saw a dream. It seemed to him that he was lying with a fair boy and when he had a seminal discharge he ejected the stone and picked it up and walked out holding it in his hands (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 14, Ed: 232).

In the first example, the man experiences a homoerotic dream. Because he is already in the womb-*abaton* and the masculine and feminine creative energies are balanced as he slept, the man's ailment is healed. The dreamt sex act with the boy arouses his own creative energies and causes the man to ejaculate; the ultimate expression of male creative force. The stone which was the cause of his discomfort is ejected with the semen, indicating that the arousal of his creative powers within the gender balanced space brings about the cure.

In another example, Diateus is healed by being trampled on by horses driven by Asklepios. His ailment was most likely impotence as "the knees are symbolic of strength and manliness...presumably paralyzed knees = impotence" (Rousselle: 1985, 344).

Diateus of Cirrha. He happened to be paralyzed in his knees. While sleeping in the Temple he saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god ordered his servants to lift him up and to carry him outside the Adyton and to lay him down in front of the Temple. After they had carried him outside, the god yoked his horses to a chariot and drove three times around him in a circle and trampled on him with his horses and he got control of his knees instantly. When day came he walked out sound (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 38, Ed: 237).

Horses are seen as powerful symbols of the libido and are extremely sexually charged actors within dreams (Jung 310-311), whose "tracks are idols dispensing blessing and fertility" (Jung, 311). In order to heal the failing of his own sexuality, Diaetus experiences a violent

reinvigoration of his creative potential by the horses, animals that are equated with rampant sexuality and, according to Devereux and Henderson,<sup>25</sup> can be gendered male or female. Artemidorus,<sup>26</sup> however, is “quite specific; in a dream, the horse is female...To drive around, *perielaukein*, also refers to sexual intercourse, and doing it three times is a sign of virility” (Rousselle: 1985, 344). If we accept Artemidorus’ argument, Diateus experiences a sexually charged dream as he is trampled by the female horses in a faux sex act, wherein the violent sexuality rejuvenates his own creative potential. Further, the female horses are driven by the masculine creative power of Asklepios himself; powers which he transfers to the impotent Diateus. The creative powers of both sexes were therefore active and balanced in Diateus’ dream, and he was able to receive the cure. Just as Chiron the centaur is able to heal through his nature-culture fusion and connection to sexuality through his horse half, the suppliant is healed by the dream-horses’ sexuality.

The large majority of the inscriptions that deal with female suppliants’ focus on sterility and fertility issues. It is no surprise, therefore, that dream-healing often comes to female suppliants in the form of a sexual encounter with the male creative force in Asklepios himself. “Women are assumed to be markedly more open to erotic emotion than men” (Carson, 138), and the testimonies reveal women’s sexual dreams to be somewhat more explicit and overtly erotic than the sexual dreams of men. This eroticism is manifested in “coital wish-fulfillment dreams...[where] Asklepios himself appears” (Rousselle: 1985, 341):

Andromache of Eperius, for the sake of offspring. She slept in the Temple and saw a dream. It seemed to her that a handsome boy uncovered her, after that the god touched her with his hand, whereupon a son was born to Andromache from Arybbas (*IG*, IV2, 1, nos. 121-22, 31, Ed: 235).

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<sup>25</sup> Devereux, *Dreams*, p. 48; on horses, p. 279; Henderson, horses as phallus as well as wife, pp. 126-27, 164-66, virility, 50, 121

<sup>26</sup> Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*, 1.47, 1.56, 5, 46.

When Asklepios touches the female suppliant with his hand, “the hand of the god = his phallus is generally accepted” (Rousselle: 1985, 341); this phallic nature of touch corresponds similarly to Asklepios’ staff and his sacred serpents, both ithyphallic entities” (Rousselle: 1985, 341-2). The barren Andromache is symbolically penetrated by Asklepios within her dream, and it is suggested here that the god himself cures her infertility and impregnates her. The identification of the *abaton* as the sacred mother’s womb is especially significant for the barren female suppliant. Her creative energies are impotent, and thus within the symbolic womb, wherein the female creative energies are at their most potent, she experiences a divine sexual arousal which awakens her own creative potential. Thus, she is healed by the balanced sexual powers through the sexual stimulation of her own creative energy.

The male and female creative powers lie within their sexuality. Female reproduction requires a sexual encounter, she must be stimulated and penetrated in order to realize her ability to nurture and create new life inside her. The male’s creative potential and power also exists within his sexuality, as the male phallus must penetrate and emit semen in order to create a new life. Both genders’ sexual creative power is impotent, barren, and useless without the other; they must both be balanced, active, and cooperative in order for their potential to be realized. Therefore, in this dreamed encounter, Andromache is able to receive the cure in the sexually balanced sacred space as she is penetrated.

These inscriptions depict very personal and admittedly sometimes bizarre interactions with the gendered entities associated with the healing cult of Asklepios. They demonstrate multiple dreamt avenues for healing through dreams; but all communicate an experience wherein their own sexual energies combine with the balanced male and female creative energies to bring about a cure. “The inscription, however, moves out of the realm of the personal and becomes a



public document, commemorating the vision, but also instructing later suppliants (and scholars), and communicating a complex sequence of ideas that link the health and the wholeness of the body with the two parallel dimensions of the divine realm” (LiDonnici, 1) embodied by Asklepios and Hygeia; nature and culture, health and medical intervention. The personal testimonies of the cure, therefore, reflect the ancient Greek perception that the suppliant needs to experience a sexually charged interaction with both male and female creative principles within the dream to receive the cure.

Jung says that “the sexual phantasies of the neurotic and the exquisite sexual language of dreams are...merely a symbol” for a straightforward thought or wish (Jung, 433). The ancient suppliants wished desperately for healing and, understanding that sexual balance in creative energies must be present in order for their wish to be fulfilled, unconsciously projected their desire for healing into a divine sexual encounter within the gendered sacred space; the sexual experiences within the dreams were sexual, in part, because the suppliant went into the *abaton* believing a that sexual experience with Asklepios or his representatives was vital to their cure.

## Section 4:

### Images of Healing

“Along the left side of the great temple [sc. In Olympia]...[are depicted] Asklepios and Health”  
(Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, V, 26, 2, Ed: 348).

The evidence that I have previously presented suggests that the ancient Greeks understood that one could be restored to health within the healing sanctuaries of Asklepios through the balance of masculine and feminine creative principles represented by the deities of healing and the rituals of the cure. It appears that the ancient Greek understanding of the gendered nature of healing is also present in the works of art featuring Asklepios and Hygeia. I have noticed iconographical consistencies in the depiction of Asklepios and Hygeia in a number of different types of artistic representations, ranging from fourth century BCE relief tablets to second century CE statuettes, and even Roman coins; all of which seem consistently to support the idea that the ancient Greeks perceived Hygeia as "Nature" and Asklepios as "Culture." All the different representations of Asklepios and Hygeia, taken as a whole, suggest a consistent message that health is only achieved through a balance of masculine & feminine principles, with the male Asklepios acting as the "actor," as it were, for the ill person on the way to returning to the female "natural state" of Hygeia. Despite the fact that we have no provenance for many of the objects and the date range and type of artifacts is wide, the iconography appears to be consistent in its message by featuring the intimate touching between the gods, Asklepios enthroned, the presence of the serpent, and the feeding of the snake by the deities.

According to Edelstein, “the Asklepios ideal as it was gradually developed by sculptors and painters expressed and determined the sentiments and emotions which inspired the worshipers of the god” (Edelstein, vii). One way that this is achieved is through depicting

Asklepios and Hygeia together. Pausanias takes note of six outstanding examples where Asklepios and Hygeia are featured together prominently both within their own sacred precincts and religious centers devoted to other deities.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Asklepios and Hygeia are depicted as an intimately connected pair on the temple of Zeus at Olympia (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, Ed: 348), one of the most important temples in the Greek world, indicates that the artists understood the necessity of both health/nature and *techne*/culture in the ritual and cult of healing.

Asklepios and Hygeia are always depicted in artistic representations with the dually gendered, healing-empowered serpent. The image of the serpent functions as the embodiment of the healing power that is manifested when Asklepios' and Hygeia's masculine and feminine creative powers are combined. The serpent represents and possesses attributes unique to both nature and culture, female and male, and therefore it capable of healing in and of itself. When depicted with Hygeia and Asklepios respectively, the serpent takes on the attributes and creative energy of the opposite gender to the divinity, and thus completes the balance of gendered potency necessary for healing.

In Figure 2, a second century CE Roman statuette of Asklepios, the god is depicted alone, as a boyish youth. Here, Asklepios' male creative energies, which are embodied by his prodigious medicinal *techne*, are balanced by the presence of the serpent, which, in this case, takes on its feminine gendered identity. Asklepios is holding his staff, a potent phallic symbol

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<sup>27</sup> 1) "Bryaxis [2<sup>nd</sup> half of 4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.] made the image of Asclepius, itself and that of Health as well [sc., in Megara]" (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, I, 40, 6, Ed:). 2) "Carved in relief before the entrance are, on one side Artemis, on the other Asclepius and Health [sc. At Megalopolis]" (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, VII, 31, 1, Ed:348). 3) "Along the left side of the great temple [sc. In Olympia]...[are depicted] Asclepius and Health" (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, V, 26, 2, Ed:348). 4) "The images of Asclepius and of health [sc., at Corinth] are of white marble..." (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, II, 4, 5, Ed:356). 5) "On one side of the image of Athena [sc., at Tegea] stands Asclepius, on the other Health, in Pentelic marble, works of Scopas of Paros [ca. 400-350 B.C.]" (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, VIII, 47, 1, Ed:352). 6) "The buildings put up in our own day by the Roman Senator Antoninus include a bath of Asclepius;...a temple to Hygieia, as well as to Asclepius" (Pausanias, ET 793, Hart, 60).

that represents his sexual creative force. In the hand of the young Asklepios, the staff represents the height of his sexual potency and creative power. His virility is balanced by the presence of the female serpent slithering up and visually offsetting the staff which represents his masculinity. Within this image, masculine and feminine creative principles are represented and balanced by both Asklepios and the serpent on the one hand, and within the symbolic interaction of male and female sexual energies through the serpent and the staff on the other.

Figure 3 presents a scenario in which Asklepios, Hygeia, and the serpent interact. In this votive relief dated 325 BCE, enthroned Asklepios commands the scene as he beckons his suppliants forward, his arm bent in a right angle. This is a phallic gesture that, combined with his placement on the throne, indicates his virility and masculine power as ruler of the sacred precinct of healing. The ithyphallic yet feminine serpent, coiled beneath him, is peeking out from behind the leg of his throne directly beneath his forearm. In size, Asklepios dominates the scene and the suppliants are depicted much smaller. He is only surpassed by the towering figure of Hygeia who stands behind his throne in a relaxed, yet confident, position with her left arm tucked behind, and presumably touching Asklepios. Her dominant position in this relief suggests that Health is the ultimate goal within the healing cult. Although she does not directly interact with the suppliants, Hygeia oversees everything and is omnipresent by necessity for healing to occur. Asklepios and Hygeia's bodies also reveal their intimate relationship as they are both relaxed and appear to be touching in a manner so comfortable that it can only be achieved by two entities that are intimately and, in this case, inextricably connected.

In Figures 4 (a), a Roman Silver Denarius, 217-128 CE, and 4 (b), a fourth century BCE relief, depict the deities of healing feeding the sacred serpent. In 4 (a), Hygeia's female creative force is balanced by the ithyphallic serpent who, in these instances, takes on its masculine form.

“The snake is Hygeia’s constant attribute” (Stafford, 130) as it represents male potency and sexual creative power that must be present in order for the complete picture of healing to be presented. Here, Hygeia is enthroned, leaning forward to feed the erect serpent before her, whom she grasps in one hand and feeds in the other. The ithyphallic, male gendered serpent is literally being nourished and stimulated in this image, indicating that the masculine and feminine creative principles must not only be present for healing to occur, but that they must also be nourished and invigorated. The connection of serpent to throne, as we see in this image and in Figure 3, alludes to the power of the serpent itself. The serpent is so sacred that it is not only depicted with the deities of healing, but it is intimately connected to them through touching their physical persons and the seat of their power. As the embodiment of health and healing, the serpent holds immense power in the healing cult; however, since it represents healing, it must be nourished by the gendered divinities of healing.

In Figure 4 (b), Hygeia and Asklepios are seated in thrones together as Hygeia feeds the serpent. In this case, the serpent is coiled around a clearly phallic spear that dominates the left side of the relief. The combination of serpent and spear is a visual representation of male and female sexuality and creative potency, and it is here that the serpent is fed by Health herself. Although Hygeia is the only divinity actively feeding the serpent, Asklepios’ presence in the frame indicates that the artist understood the intimate connection between the two deities of healing; a male/female, *techne*/nature connection that must be balanced and strong in order for the serpent, healing, to be nourished.

In both 4 (a) and (b) Hygeia is holding the phallic serpent with one hand and is feeding it with the other. Hygeia’s touch comingles with the nourishment of the potent male snake and represents another sexual encounter wherein the female feeds and invigorates the male creative

energies within the phallus through the touch of the sex act. The sexual power of this scene is further reinforced by their intimate proximity as Asklepios' right foot appears to rest atop Hygeia's left. The foot, especially the toe as I have previously cited from Rousselle, has strong phallic symbolic connotations; therefore the intimate proximity and subsequent relationship between the deities is heightened as they engage in several simultaneous sexual encounters. The balanced picture of healing, therefore, is presented by the deities of healing and the serpent's intimate interaction. These images communicate the understanding that the balance of male and female energies, when nourished and invigorated through sexuality, as the deities feed the serpent, can bring about a return to health and a cure for the suppliant.

Figure 5 (c. 200 BCE) is one of the best artistic renderings of Asklepios and Hygeia; it completes the whole picture of healing. It is the most blatantly sexual of all those I discuss. Hygeia and Asklepios sit touching one another in a reiteration of their necessary interaction and balance in the healing cult. Hygeia stands leaning on Asklepios, breast exposed, gazing at him lovingly. Asklepios' only visible clothing is a cloth draped haphazardly across his lap. The serpent coils around Asklepios, representing his disembodied phallus, and stands erect to be held in Asklepios' lap by Hygeia. This can be interpreted as a sexual encounter between the deities of healing. They are portrayed as engaging with one another intimately and lovingly, and their casually draped clothing reveals bits of nudity. The serpent literally and figuratively connects the duo. The product of this sexual union of *techne* and harmony with nature is healing. Ultimately, this symbolic sexual encounter provides the most persuasive proof that the ancient Greeks at least implicitly understood that masculine and feminine creative powers, embodied by Asklepios, Hygeia, and the dually-gendered serpent, needed to be actively present and balanced for healing to occur.

## Conclusion

Through this study of myth, the sacred precinct, testimonies of the healed, and images of the gods themselves, I conclude that the presence and active influence of the masculine and feminine, natural and cultural restorative powers must be balanced for a restoration to health and true healing to occur. Gender and sexuality, especially the need for balance between male and female creative principles, influenced every aspect of the healing cult of Asklepios, from the ritual interaction between the sick and the divinities, to the artistic depictions of Hygeia and Asklepios. The works of Hesiod present a cosmos wherein the creative energies of nature, the ultimate female force, and the male cultural forces which seek to control and manipulate nature, must exist in balance. The ancient Greeks worshiped Asklepios and Hygeia together in the healing cults, continually lauded and appealed to them in tandem, and their powers and import were reflected in simultaneous artistic renderings of the deities of healing. Physicians and philosophers spoke of a need for a balance of gendered elements in the body in order for one to be healthy and well.

Although the expectations of behavior and social role dictated by gender often divided the sexes in ancient Greece, I conclude that it was at least implicitly if not explicitly understood by the ancient Greeks that the creative forces and restorative powers of both genders must combine in order for the suffering suppliant of Asklepios to receive his or her cure. Jung says that in myth, bisexuality, or the balance of gendered creative principles within the cult of Asklepios, brings about rejuvenation, rebirth, and essentially immortality (Jung, 326); this is precisely the kind of power the Asklepios-Hygeia sexual binary possesses. Therefore, it was imperative that balanced sexual duality be present in every aspect of the healing cult, as it was through this very balance that the divinities' power to heal was derived.

Carl Jung said of his work and the discipline of psychoanalysis: “we take mythologic symbols much too concretely and wonder at every step about the endless contradictions” (Jung, 249). This is the primary risk faced by my study: Is Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis and their interpretation of symbols within dreams, myth, and art legitimate? As Jung admits, this is certainly a question and a risk I face. On the other hand, Freud and especially Jung in my case, spent their careers studying and interpreting dreams and myth in order to discover deeper meaning within the often times strange images and experiences depicted. I undertake the same study within the context of the cult of Asklepios; because I study dreams and myth, as they did, their studies are particularly relevant and legitimate. Certainly there are many other theoretical frameworks available. Yet, I believe my framework and interpretations are not only valid, but provide meaningful contributions to the study of the cult Asklepios from a gendered psychoanalytic perspective.

The concrete materials I study (inscriptions, literature, myth) contain within them several potential stumbling blocks. The philosophers and suppliant of Asklepios undoubtedly came from different educational and economic backgrounds; however, all testimonies concerning the god and his cult arose from the same society whose cultural poetics established gender roles and applied them to the cult of Asklepios. Subsequently, the gendered terms I use to discuss these written accounts are entirely relevant and appropriate. Still, we know proportionately very little about what the suppliant actually experienced within the sacred precinct apart from the testimonies of healing which, potentially, could communicate an extremely figurative and exaggerated experience contrary to the reality. Related to this, Rousselle notes that it is likely that the man who wrote or inscribed the testimony (all such craftsmen would have been male) “modified or altered the dream’s content in order to illustrate its importance to their theme”



(Rousselle: 1998, 2). Therefore we may not know exactly what the gendered dream experience was without the gender-biases inherent in the recording process.

I also excluded several bodies of physical evidence related to Asklepios healing cults including anatomical terracotta offerings and other small archaeological finds. The massive number of votives collected from the Asklepieion at Corinth, for example, depict body parts that the suppliant assumedly desired to be healed by the god or as a thanks offering for previous healing (Roebuck, 112). There exists extremely little information about who dedicated these votives, when they were dedicated, or under what context; they were found in large deposits with little to no collectible data for study apart from specific body part depicted and numbers of votives (Roebuck, 118) (Blomerus, 20, 137). Ultimately, there was simply not enough available information concerning the gender and identity of the devotee and exact purpose and context of the votive to analyze them in this kind of concrete gender study.

I only included and analyzed a fraction of the ancient material relevant to Asklepios and Hygeia in this study. There is substantial work to be done with votive offerings. Perhaps a gendered study of the history of the healing sanctuary, including inscriptions, archaeology, votives, architecture, layers of building and cult activity, and literature can be undertaken. I hope that I have opened the door for future gendered studies of Asklepios, Hygeia and the healing cult. I would like to see a study of the continuity and change in the gendered experience of Hygeia and Asklepios in the healing cult from the fourth century BCE.

# Images

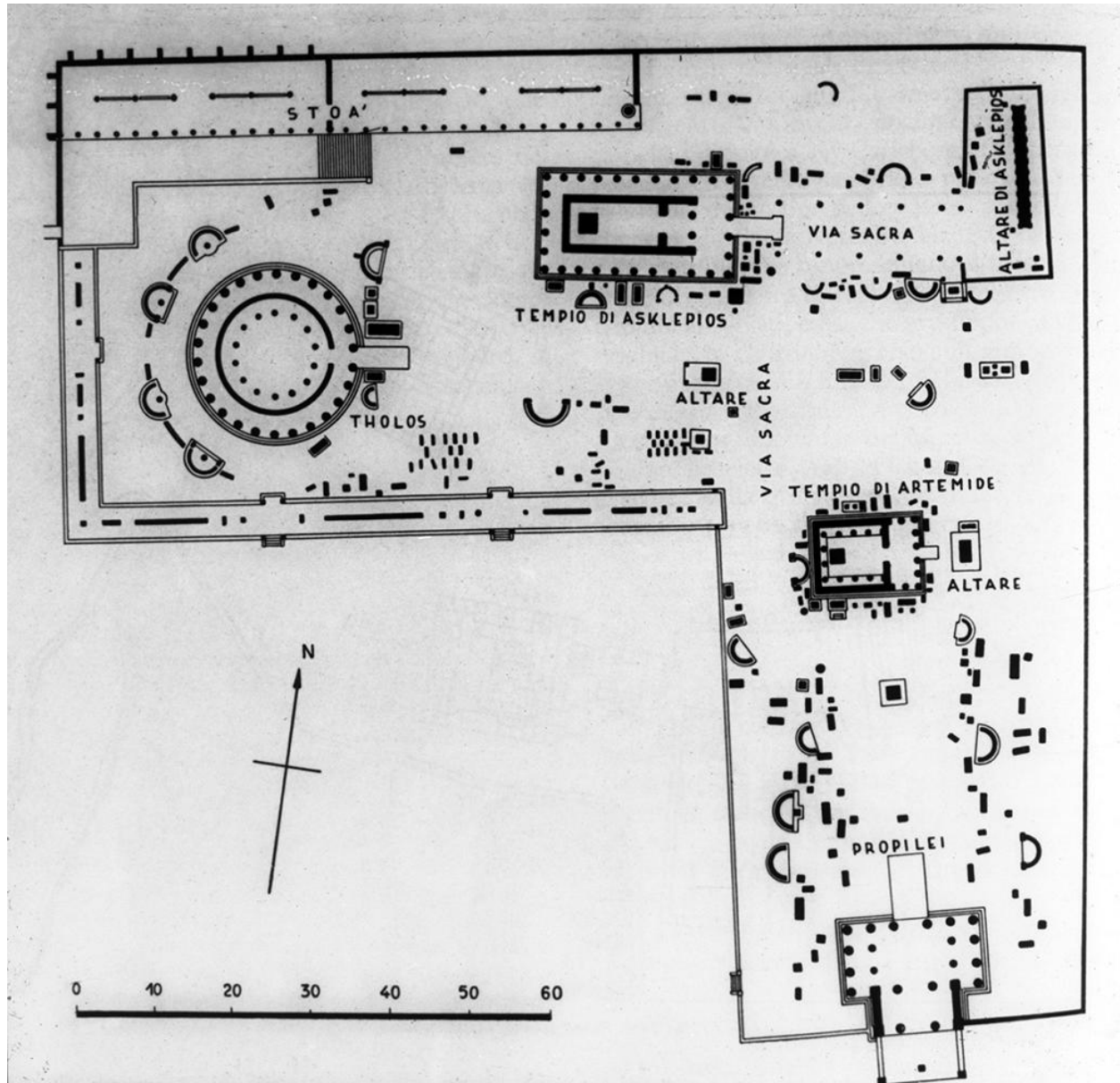


Figure 1



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4 (a)**





**Figure 4 (b)**



**Figure 5**

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